

Ratigan: Alright, the countdown clock has begun, and I'm not referring to the Thanksgiving turkey. I'm referring to another turkey of sorts – the debt supercommittee. Why call some of the most respected lawmakers in Washington a turkey you ask? Well, because even if the group does manage to muster up a deal or cut more than a trillion dollars in debt, the cuts will do nothing to address the real problems in our country, in banking, education, health care, trade and the tax code -- all of which are sold at auction and have put us in this mess.

After two months of work, even a basic deal looks unlikely, the six Republican and six Democrats have until midnight next Wednesday to reach a deal of some kind. If not, it's no Thanksgiving for them. The automatic trigger kicks in, cutting \$1.2 trillion across the board, minus Social Security and Medicaid - a major sticking point in discussions is defense spending. If no deal is made, there are automatic defense cuts of \$550 billion, and according to Defense Chief Leon Panetta, that would be a disaster, as he sees it.

He writes, "We would have to reduce the size of the military sharply. Rough estimates suggest after ten years of these cuts, we would have the smallest ground force since 1940, the smallest number of ships since 1915, and the smallest air force in its history."

Conventional wisdom says the right and left can't agree on anything, but this afternoon we find ourselves with a Tea Party Republican and a Democratic Congressman who agree on this -- the Pentagon budget can no longer be off-limits. Joining us now, Democratic Congressman Mike Quigley and Tea Party Republican Congressman, Mike Coffman, who has 21 years of military service.

And Congressman Coffman, I will begin with you. What is the distinction between the debate of how much we spend? We spend a lot, we spend a little, whatever it might be, and how we actually spend it, and how critical is the distinction between the amount of money that's allocated and actually what you do with the money to provide security?

Coffman: You know, I think it's very important to take a look at what we're doing, and I think that, you know, no department of the federal government ought to be off-limits from cuts and from efficiencies.

And so, I think everything ought to be on the table to include defense. I would never advocate anything that compromised the defense capability of the United States, but I think that the military's too top-heavy. We've gone in the wrong direction with nation building. We've got overseas military bases we ought to be able to look at, and we need to examine our force structure, and to see what can be moved into the guard and reserve.

Ratigan: The biggest barrier to this, Congressman Quigley, would seem to be money. I cannot think of an industry that delivers more pork to every congressional district in America, and I defy any congressperson to stand up and put their sacred cow in their district in Florida, Texas, New York, wherever it might be. How do you circumvent the incredible role of money in politics in defending the pork that is delivered through the defense budget to every congressional district in America?

Quigley: Look, I think you have to take the message directly to the public. I try to tell people that the Department of Defense can't even be audited. It won't be able to be audited for another six or seven years, and I remind them that there were 45 terrorist attacks on our country, threats since 9/11. They have all been foiled. Not by large ground forces or super weapon systems, but by good intelligence and good police work. We need to be smarter about how we defend our country, not just throw money at it. The choices the Department of Defense make right now make us less safe, not more safe.

Ratigan: And to that end, Congressman Coffman, it seems that there is a culture in this country that believes if you just spend more money than anybody else on something, regardless of how you spend the money, we spend the most in the world on health care, we spend the most in the world on education – other than Iceland, we spend the most in the world on energy, and yet our efficiencies and output statistics continue to be abominable. And we all know that we can get a lot more for a lot less. I guess the question is, how do you politically overcome those who correlate cutting spending to cutting service and cutting effectiveness?

Coffman: Well, I think we're going to have a tough argument on our hands. I mean, I think if

we make the cuts intelligently -- now, I worry about the effects if we don't come to an agreement with a supercommittee in those cuts. I think that's pretty deep, but I put forward cuts to the supercommittee on defense that, again, I think won't compromise our capability and are essential. And, I think you're right - it's just not a function of how much you spend on defense in terms of your commitment, but it's really what you spend it on. It's important to be tough, but we've also got to be smart. And I don't think, probably, for a long time, we've been very smart.

Ratigan: And Congressman Quigley, I'll give you the last word. You're on the elevator with a fellow congressperson who could not disagree with you more. What do you say to him on the elevator ride to turn him to your side?

Quigley: I think I quote Secretary Gates who said things like that there's 30 levels between the chain of command to an officer in the field, a member in the field, that we don't need 11 aircraft carriers strike forces. No other country in the world has more than one. And of course, there's a half billion dollars a year we spend on musical bands -- not making us safer.

Ratigan: Congressmen, I wish you the best of luck, and I hope that you are part of a new generation of legislators that do, indeed, seek not only to work together, but to do it in a way that is issue specific and resource intelligent. Thank you, guys.

Quigley & Coffman: Thanks for having us.